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## INSIDE...

|                            |      |
|----------------------------|------|
| <i>FIRST DAY HIKES</i>     | P. 2 |
| <i>2013 ATTENDANCE</i>     | P. 3 |
| <i>THE STEWARD CHANGES</i> | P. 4 |
| <i>FALL COLOR REPORTS</i>  | P. 5 |
| <i>DEER GET NEW HOME</i>   | P. 6 |

Pat McCrory  
Governor

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John E. Skvarla, III  
Secretary, DENR

# DIRECTOR LEDFORD RETIRES

Lewis Ledford's legacy to the state parks system and to North Carolina was celebrated Feb. 1 at an event for the retiring director of the N.C. Division of Parks and Recreation. Ledford ended a 37-year career with the state parks and will serve as executive director of the National Association of State Parks Directors.

As more than 300 people gathered at NCSU's State Club, a recurring theme was Ledford's work ethic, integrity and dedication to "the culture he instilled in the state parks," as described by Brad Ives, assistant secretary of the N.C. Department of Environment and Natural Resources.

"When you realize what special people he hired and trained and mentored in the system, you see that we have a culture that's going to outlast Lewis Ledford," Ives said. "He set up the state parks system in a way that will succeed and thrive without him."

Former State Senator Walter Dalton added, "He made a good living for himself but a good life for all in North Carolina."

*CONTINUED ON PAGE 4*



*AERIAL VIEW OF CROWDERS MOUNTAIN STATE PARK.*

# CROWDERS MOUNTAIN 'PARK OF THE YEAR'

Crowders Mountain State Park in Gaston County has been named the North Carolina 2013 Park of the Year by the N.C. Division of Parks and Recreation.

The park was chosen for its "exemplary contribution to the North Carolina state parks mission of stewardship, public service and education," and specifically recognized for initiatives in natural resource management, volunteerism and expanded recreation opportunities.

"Crowders Mountain has developed into one of our busiest state parks with more than 300,000 visitors each year, yet the staff has found

time to develop new ideas in recreation, protection of natural resources and involvement with the community," said Lewis Ledford, state parks director. "This exemplary performance led to its selection as Park of the Year."

During the year, Crowders Mountain arranged regular volunteer workdays to expand its 20-mile system of hiking trails, enlarged and improved a popular family campground and safely hosted about 10,000 rock climbers.

Its central parking area was doubled in size, yet consistently fills on weekends.

*CONTINUED ON PAGE 3*

Department of Environment and Natural Resources





*LARGE CROWDS APPEARED IN GOOD WEATHER AT HAW RIVER STATE PARK, ABOVE, AND CARVERS CREEK STATE PARK, RIGHT, WHERE AMERICORPS MEMBER BILL STANLEY LED THE PARK'S FIRST HIKE.*



## 2,627 EXPLORE ON FIRST DAY HIKES

From a blustery push to Mount Mitchell's summit and the lip of Hanging Rock to a leisurely stroll on Bear Island's beach, hikers were out in force Jan. 1 for First Day Hikes held throughout the state parks system. In all, 2,442 hikers covered more than 4,500 miles on state park trails.

The statewide event in its third year was blessed with good weather. Hikes were held at each of the 40 state parks and state recreation areas as well as Mount Jefferson State Natural Area.

Of course, attendance was highest at Eno River State Park, where a New Year's Day hike has been a tradition for decades. The park had 599 hikers, effectively making the event some-

what of a parade along the trails.

Elsewhere, attendance was highest at William B. Umstead State Park (170), Raven Rock State Park (148) and Jordan Lake State Natural Area (123), at its New Hope Overlook Trail.

The most "experienced" hikers may have been Dan and Dot Jones who appeared at Raven Rock. Dan, 91, and his wife, 86, are both avid walkers. He remains an active scout leader and enjoys hiking the Appalachian Trail. A native of the area, he helped build the park's overlook in the late 1970s.

A special guest at New River was Allmuth "Curly" Perzel, a longtime friend of the park who was a hike co-leader. Perzel is a German native who holds a Triple Crown Award, the most prestigious U.S. hiking accolade, for completing the Appalachian Trail, the Pacific Crest Trail and the Continental Divide Trail. The three combine for more than 8,000 miles, and there are fewer than 200 people who've hiked it all.

The event was a special "first" at Carvers Creek State Park in Cumberland County, which opened in September. Seventy-one hikers showed for the First Day Hike, led by Superintendent Jane Conolly and Bill Stanley, who is one of a crew of Americorps workers helping with interpretive and education programs in the parks this year.

Stanley arrived at the park in December and had crammed on details about James Stillman Rockefeller and his 1,000-acre estate, which is a central component of the new park.



*THE DRAMATIC JOMEKEE TRAIL WAS POPULAR AT PILOT MOUNTAIN STATE PARK.*



# ATTENDANCE REMAINS AT RECORD LEVEL

(Find complete visitation totals on Page 7.)

For the third straight year, attendance at North Carolina's state parks and state recreation areas hovered at a record level with 14.2 million visits in 2013.

Among 40 state parks and state recreation areas, 19 reported increases in attendance in 2013. Fort Macon State Park in Carteret County reported the highest attendance at 1.19 million visits, followed closely by Jockey's Ridge State

## PARK OF THE YEAR

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

The park developed aggressive plans to remove invasive species and schedule prescribed burns, and partnered with nearby Belmont Abbey College to complete a comprehensive plant survey.

The state parks system began choosing a Park of the Year in 2010 with nominations from each of four districts.

Each of 40 state parks and recreation areas submits an annual report that is objectively scored on progress in recreation, natural resource protection, sustainability, public safety and environmental education.

Final judging is by senior and peer administrators. To honor the Park of the Year, a medallion is attached to a hiking staff that is passed to the current award recipient each year. Hanging Rock State Park in Stokes County was honored in 2012.

Crowders Mountain State Park was authorized in 1971.

Park in Dare County with 1.18 million visits.

"Throughout fluctuations in the economy and the tourism industry, visitation at state parks has remained steady and robust, and that reflects the value North Carolinians place on outdoor experiences and the state's rich natural resources," said Carol Tingley, acting state parks director. "Also, visitation at this level reveals the strong contribution that our state parks make to North Carolina's tourism economy as well as the economies of the local communities in which they're located."

A recent economic study revealed that travelers spend an average \$23.56 a day to enjoy the state parks. The analysis by North Carolina State University's Department of Parks, Recreation and Tourism Management estimated the state parks system's total annual economic impact at more than \$400 million.

Over the past 25 years, the state parks system has seen a dramatic 80 percent increase in visitation. In 1988, 7.89 million people visited state parks and state recreation areas.

Weather over the course of a year can have a significant impact on state park attendance. Heavy rains in late spring and early summer dampened visitation at many parks, but otherwise the system was not affected by winter storms or tropical storms or hurricanes during 2013.

Several relatively new state parks reported strong attendance, especially Carvers Creek State Park in Cumberland County, which reported 38,740 visitors since it opened in September.

Mayo River State Park in Rockingham County experienced a 69 percent jump in visitation, while Dismal Swamp State Park in Camden County reported visitation up 40 percent.



## RAVEN ROCK BRIDLE TRAIL

A NEW BRIDLE TRAIL PARKING AREA WAS RECENTLY COMPLETED AT RAVEN ROCK STATE PARK IN HARNETT COUNTY ADDING SPACE FOR BOTH SINGLE VEHICLES AND THOSE WITH TRAILERS. THE TRAIL ON THE NORTH SIDE OF THE PARK IS EXTREMELY POPULAR.

# THE STEWARD SHIFTS TO DIGITAL FORMAT

In its 98-year history, the state parks system and the N.C. Division of Parks and Recreation has developed and changed in countless ways. The Steward (along with its predecessor The Courier) has kept careful track of those changes for more than 25 years.

This modest newsletter became the document of record for a dynamic agency that will soon celebrate its 100<sup>th</sup> birthday.

The Steward as a reliable source of news and information about state parks will also develop in 2014 into an all-digital version delivered directly to the inboxes of our friends, supporters, stakeholders and employees. A new email newsletter version will debut in coming months.

Perhaps few things have changed as radically in recent years as reading habits, with people developing a strong preference for timely information in efficient and attractive formats.

That's why in 2012, we developed the state parks system's blog ([ncstateparks.wordpress.com](http://ncstateparks.wordpress.com)), which to date has delivered 87 posts of

state parks and division news online. Since its inception, the blog's posts have been reconfigured for print in The Steward.

The Steward email version will not only be more timely, but will be a more efficient news outlet in an age when wise use of resources is paramount.

All that's necessary for state parks friends and supporters to continue receiving The Steward is to email us at [steve.livingstone@ncparks.gov](mailto:steve.livingstone@ncparks.gov). We'll collect your email address to deliver the electronic version. An email subscription can be stopped or restarted at any time.

The look and the method of delivery may change, but the long heritage of The Steward will remain the same.

It will continue to be a historical record of the division's people and programs, the growth of the state parks system and our employees' innovative ideas for recreation, conservation, environmental education and natural resource management.

## LEDFORD

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Ledford joined the state parks system as a ranger in 1976 and was the first person to rise through the ranks to the director's position. He served in many management capacities including superintendent of Mount Mitchell State Park, west district superintendent and superintendent of state parks. He succeeded Phil McKnelly as director in 2003. His successor has not been named though Deputy Director Carol Tingley is acting director.

Under Ledford's leadership, state park lands increased by more than 50,000 acres and the system has boasted a record visitation level of more than 14 million. Ledford guided the creation of six new state parks including Chimney Rock and Grandfather Mountain, as well as a state trail and six state natural areas. He directed the launch of a full-service reser-



LEDFORD, LEFT, GETS DIVISION PLAQUE FROM CHIEF OF OPERATIONS MIKE LAMBERT.

vations system and numerous other technology innovations.

Ledford told the group that being one of only seven directors in the 98-year history of North Carolina's state parks was a "unique experience."

"I'm excited to continue

working with state parks," he said. "We're all truly standing on the shoulders of those who've come before. We've got to make those shoulders broad, whatever station in which we serve, if we are to make this state parks system great."



# RANGERS PROVIDE FALL COLOR REPORTS

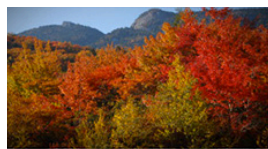
During the fall color season in 2013, travelers were able to keep track of peak color as it made its way across the state through regular reports from state park rangers.

Updates on the website of the N.C. Division of Travel, Film and Sports Development kept visitors posted on how fall color progressed through the different types of forests in North Carolina, from the brilliant red of mountain sourwood to the rust-colored cedar in eastern wetlands.

The fall season in the state generally lasts from late September into December.

“State parks, with their convenient access and miles of hiking trails, are natural destinations for people who want to get up close and personal with fall color. And, the 42 state park units present the fall foliage experience in every corner of the state,” said Lewis Ledford, state parks director.

Western state parks

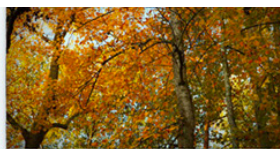


## Mountain Foliage Reports

Latest:

New River State Park | Sep. 25

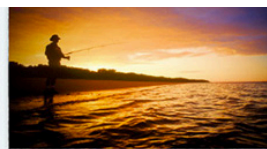
Ill in the mountains is a sight to see as leaves change to brilliant shades of red, orange and gold.



## Piedmont Foliage Reports

The diverse landscape of the Piedmont offers plenty of scenic drives and hikes to view fall color.

Check back soon for reports from our state park rangers to find peak conditions for viewing fall color.



## Coastal Fishing and Activity Reports

With its mild temperatures and abundant fishing and wildlife, fall is an ideal time to visit the coast.

Check back soon for reports from our state park rangers on water temperatures, fishing and wildlife viewing.

early on joined a list of sites reporting peak color to [www.visitnc.com](http://www.visitnc.com), which prominently featured a fall foliage travel section.

As the season progressed, rangers in other regions of the state submitted similar reports as well as reports on coastal fall fishing.

Just a few of the most popular state parks for enjoying fall color include:

Stone Mountain State Park in Wilkes and Alleghany counties, where fall color is peaking just as leaves begin to fall in the higher elevations of the Blue Ridge Mountains. The park offers more than 18 miles

of hiking trails.

Hanging Rock State Park in Stokes County, named in 2012 as one of the 10 best spots for viewing fall color in the South by Southern Living magazine. The park offers trails across nine named peaks.

Raven Rock State Park in Harnett County, where beech groves and hardwood forests mix with eastern evergreens. The park offers surprisingly challenging terrain in the piedmont.

Merchants Millpond State Park in Gates County, where swamp cedars and stands of hardwood alternate color palettes.

# CLIMBERS, HIKERS HELP CHIMNEY ROCK

Climbers and hikers are combining forces at Chimney Rock State Park to tackle improvements that will benefit both user groups.

The target area is the Rumbling Bald Climbing Access where nearly two dozen volunteers appeared with tools on a November weekend.

Park Superintendent James Ledgerwood said the area – across Hickory Nut Gorge from the popular Chimney Rock access – offered a confusing spider web of old bushwhacked trails and logging roads used by climbers to reach park climbing routes as well as property owned by the Carolina Climbing Coalition.

The Carolina Mountain Land Club, a hiking group eager for new trails in the new park, saw an opportunity and offered to help.

Ledgerwood said the two groups obviously have some overlapping membership and interests

along with those of the Friends of Chimney Rock State Park.

“I kind of consider our climbing routes as just vertical trails,” he said. “Historically, there just haven’t been good horizontal routes to get to those.”

A proper loop trail leading to the cliff faces climbers love – and that will steer people away from sensitive natural areas – can be a starting point for a bigger trail system coveted by hikers, he said.

The park’s master plan includes an ambitious 50-mile trail network, anchored by a perimeter trail with primitive campsites likely to become a backpacker’s dream.

To create it all would require some key land acquisitions. But just as important are the partnerships with key user groups and the enthusiasm of volunteers.

# PARK BOOSTS CHEROKEE DEER HERD

Morrow Mountain State Park is participating in a long-term project to relocate white-tailed deer from the park in Stanly County to reservation lands of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians.

Partners in the initiative are the state parks system, the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission, biologists from Great Smoky Mountains National Park and the Cherokee Fisheries and Wildlife Management program.

The project augments the reservation's sparse population of white-tailed deer, an animal that figures prominently in Cherokee lore and cultural traditions. The deer will be gradually released onto the 56,000-acre Qualla Boundary, in habitat improved for browsing and currently off-limits to hunting.

In each of the next three years, 25-50 deer will be relocated, primarily females in small family groups. Initial collections began in January, with biologists using darts to tranquilize the animals, collecting data on age and health, and fitting each with a tag and radio collar.

The deer are transported to the reservation in small individual crates with 3-5 crates carried on each vehicle. Upon arrival, the animals are subject to a "soft release" – initially kept in a four-acre, penned area and closely monitored for about four weeks before being released.

This is located on a 5,600-acre Tribal Reserve property, set aside for communal mixed-use activities (such as fishing, plant and firewood gathering, recreation, etc.)

The Cherokee Fisheries and Wildlife Management staff has been active in developing suitable browsing habitat, in part through a pre-



CRATES HOLDING A SINGLE DEER EACH ARE LOADED FOR TRANSPORT TO THE QUALLA BOUNDARY.



MARIA PALAMAR, LEFT, OF THE WILDLIFE RESOURCES COMMISSION, FITS A DEER WITH A RADIO COLLAR. scribed burn program, and is refining a long-term white-tailed deer management plan.

"We're pleased that the state park can fulfill this request for white-tailed deer on the Cherokee reservation in a way that's consistent with wise natural resource management," said Carol Tingley, acting state parks director. "Morrow Mountain State Park sustains an abundance of healthy native deer that can readily be identified and collected."

A 2013 herd health study by the state park and the Wildlife Resources Commission suggests that such a project will benefit the remaining herd and habitat at Morrow Mountain. The relocation project is carried out under specialized scientific protocols developed by the wildlife agency.

"Environmental protection of the Natural Resources of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians has been paramount for my administration. The Cherokee Fisheries and Wildlife Management program has worked to protect those resources and has worked to restore native species to the region," Cherokee Principal Chief Michell Hicks said.

A byproduct of the relocation project will be a unique research opportunity that can offer insight into white-tailed deer health and best practices for rebuilding and sustaining healthy herds. This type of information will benefit wildlife management agencies as well as private, nonprofit groups involved in deer rehabilitation.

# NORTH CAROLINA STATE PARKS

## MONTHLY ATTENDANCE REPORT

### DECEMBER, 2013

| NC STATE<br>PARK   | December<br>2013 | TOTAL YTD<br>Dec-13 | December<br>2012 | TOTAL YTD<br>Dec-12 | % CHANGE<br>[2013/2012]<br>Dec YTD |
|--|------------------|---------------------|------------------|---------------------|------------------------------------|
| Carolina Beach State Park  | 23,494           | 526,242             | 23,160           | 550,890             | 1% -4%                             |
| Carvers Creek State Park   | 4,848            | 38,740              | 0                | 125                 | -100% 30,646%                      |
| Chimney Rock State Park  | 10,340           | 222,752             | 10,414           | 227,641             | -1% -2%                            |
| Cliffs of the Neuse State Park                                     | 8,125            | 194,583             | 9,332            | 180,487             | -13% 8%                            |
| Crowders Mountain State Park                                       | 15,374           | 351,148             | 18,307           | 321,448             | -16% 9%                            |
| Disenal Swamp State Park   | 7,038            | 127,090             | 7,272            | 90,764              | -3% 40%                            |
| Elk Knob State Park  | 1,398            | 26,747              | 675              | 31,926              | 107% -16%                          |
| Eno River State Park and<br>Oconeechee Mountain State Natural Area | 25,571           | 501,124             | 28,043           | 494,285             | -5% 1%                             |
| Falls Lake State Recreation Area                                   | 22,079           | 1,045,882           | 15,734           | 924,791             | 40% 13%                            |
| Fort Fisher State Recreation Area                                  | 19,412           | 853,489             | 15,192           | 780,927             | 28% 11%                            |
| Fort Macon State Park  | 38,248           | 1,191,942           | 40,390           | 1,238,022           | -5% -4%                            |
| Goose Creek State Park   | 14,140           | 255,582             | 14,558           | 247,325             | -3% 8%                             |
| Gorges State Park  | 5,856            | 116,923             | 4,804            | 112,096             | 22% 4%                             |
| Grandfather Mountain State Park                                    | 1,129            | 70,010              | 2,457            | 77,458              | -54% -10%                          |
| Hammocks Beach State Park  | 7,310            | 135,701             | 4,188            | 127,605             | 75% 6%                             |
| Haw River State Park   | 1,132            | 29,105              | 944              | 31,147              | 20% -7%                            |
| Hanging Rock State Park  | 3,915            | 395,088             | 12,696           | 443,899             | -69% -11%                          |
| Jones Lake State Park  | 4,105            | 124,633             | 3,645            | 120,891             | 13% 3%                             |
| Jordan Lake State Recreation Area                                  | 14,212           | 1,146,191           | 30,439           | 1,177,884           | -53% -3%                           |
| Jockey's Ridge State Park  | 25,660           | 1,185,745           | 18,081           | 935,055             | 47% 27%                            |
| Kerr Lake State Recreation Area                                    | 33,246           | 1,033,136           | 33,388           | 1,119,223           | -0% -8%                            |
| Lake James State Park  | 15,764           | 398,148             | 11,823           | 390,110             | 42% 2%                             |
| Lake Norman State Park   | 29,066           | 323,237             | 22,764           | 523,443             | 28% -38%                           |
| Lake Waccamaw State Park   | 7,088            | 145,498             | 5,143            | 131,889             | 38% 10%                            |
| Lumber River State Park  | 2,304            | 48,802              | 3,060            | 54,511              | -25% -10%                          |
| Mayo River State Park  | 1,457            | 40,501              | 813              | 23,998              | 80% 69%                            |
| Merchants Millpond State Park                                      | 12,817           | 247,952             | 12,063           | 277,050             | 6% -11%                            |
| Mexlec Mountain State Park   | 2,749            | 93,045              | 5,248            | 102,500             | -48% -9%                           |
| Mount Mitchell State Park  | 2,142            | 243,654             | 2,019            | 299,839             | 6% -19%                            |
| Morrow Mountain State Park   | 9,884            | 278,924             | 14,364           | 372,548             | -31% -25%                          |
| New River State Park and<br>Mount Jefferson State Natural Area     | 9,206            | 269,845             | 7,311            | 281,589             | 26% -4%                            |
| Pettigrew State Park   | 4,197            | 80,114              | 3,245            | 67,706              | 29% 18%                            |
| Pilot Mountain State Park  | 17,215           | 426,768             | 15,931           | 437,154             | 8% -2%                             |
| Warren Rock State Park   | 8,138            | 188,645             | 12,961           | 195,415             | -37% -3%                           |
| Singletary Lake State Park   | 580              | 17,843              | 772              | 20,858              | -25% -14%                          |
| South Mountains State Park   | 7,595            | 195,975             | 7,572            | 194,520             | 0% 1%                              |
| Stone Mountain State Park  | 11,256           | 362,148             | 12,730           | 361,456             | -12% 0%                            |
| Weymouth Woods-Sandhills Nature Preserve                           | 4,125            | 57,989              | 4,077            | 55,241              | 1% 5%                              |
| William B. Umstead State Park                                      | 68,853           | 1,154,632           | 73,312           | 1,175,077           | -6% -2%                            |
| <b>SYSTEMWIDE TOTAL</b>  | <b>504,081</b>   | <b>14,155,573</b>   | <b>508,928</b>   | <b>14,198,795</b>   | <b>-1% -0%</b>                     |





## ***Our Mission Remains...***

to protect North Carolina's natural diversity;  
to provide and promote outdoor recreation  
opportunities throughout North Carolina;  
to exemplify and encourage good stewardship  
of North Carolina's natural resources for all  
citizens and visitors.

*8,000 copies of this public document were printed  
at a cost of \$753.00 or \$0.09 per copy.*

## ***SAFETY ZONE***

### **DON'T NEGLECT TO DISCONNECT**

✓ Lock out all potential energy sources before equipment maintenance or repair..

✓ Have your work crew establish its own lockout/tagout. Never work under another crew's lockout/tagout, even for a moment.

✓ Before returning equipment to service, be sure everyone involved knows your plans.

✓ Use the principles of lockout/tagout at home as well.

***The Steward***  
NC Division of Parks and Recreation  
Public Information Office  
1615 MSC  
Raleigh, NC 27699-1615

